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THE ISCARIOT

EDEN PHILLPOTTS



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1912



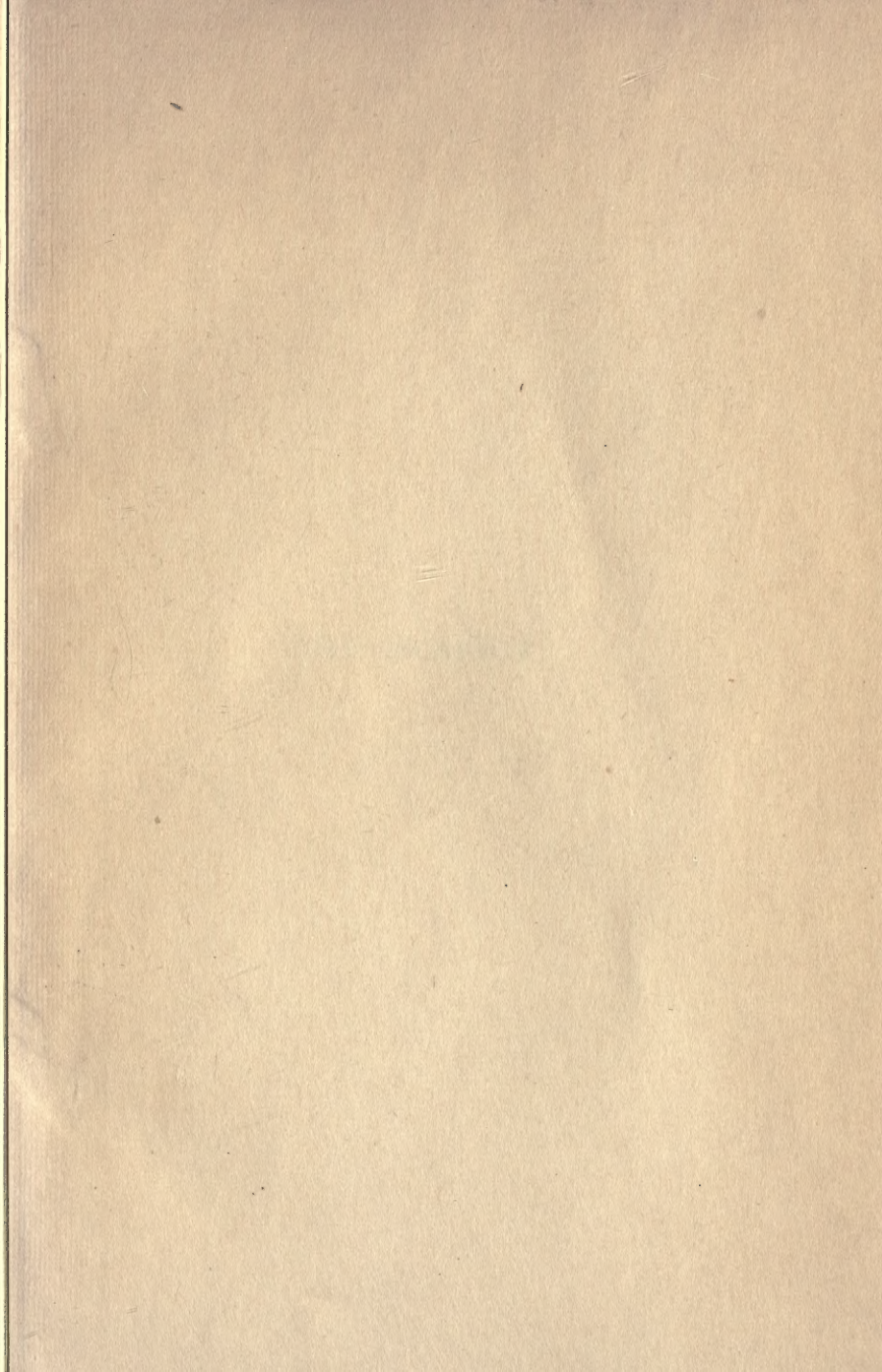
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THE ISCARIOT

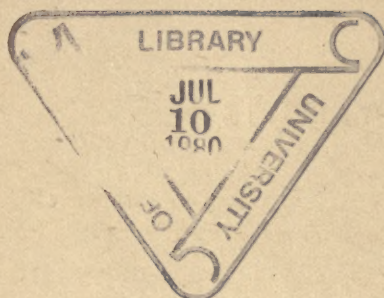
Poetry

BY EDEN PHILLPOTTS

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY
FRANK BRANGWYN, A.R.A.



JOHN LANE COMPANY
NEW YORK
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THE ISCARIOT

(In a great chamber sits the Sanhedrin about Caiaphas. To the west, between open pillars, a setting moon shines above the flat roofs of Jerusalem. Dawn has touched the east. Distant torch-light flashes fitfully and the air is tremulous with the murmur of a troubled city. Judas walks up and down before the priests and elders. Upon the paven floor lie pieces of silver scattered, some of which are illuminated by the moon and shine white, while others, reflecting the radiance of swinging lamps, glitter as though they were made of gold.)

GIVE heed to me, ye Guardians of the
Law;

Hear one cast out, already on the brink
Of the dark river. Now in patience learn
The truth of this same Jesus I have sold,
But not for thirty pieces—for a dream!
Aye, listen well; my blood's a phlegethon;
My bosom bursts with this accursèd sleight
Played by the fiends of Tophet. Gone—all
gone!

Scattered and sped and vanished, like the veil
That golden mists of morning weave and wind
About a mountain's forehead, till the sun,
Grown thirsty, drinks the nightly dew and
burns

The blessed shade away.

Conceive my dream :

Empire it was, and glory, and the reign
Of Heaven unfolded here ; our citadel—
Our holy Zion—raised to top the world ;
The promise ratified ; the dynasty
Of God and David's Son enthronèd high
Within Judea's sacred heart, to send
Sweet dayspring and deliverance and joy
Through earth's far bourne !

Ye priests, it was for that—

For that I laboured and for that I lived ;
And ere yon lesser light, now gliding down
Upon the starry purple, shall be gone,
I thought that grey Gethsemane must see
Jehovah crown His Son ! For thus it
stands

Under the signet of the Faithful One :

We are the crest and corner-stone of man,
And hold earth's everlasting destiny
By the Eternal Will in our sole hand.
To us the mastery of the world is given ;
We only, the unchanging, steadfast rock
In this mad sea of change, endure and
stand,

Unbowed, unbroken, and discriminate
Till Time is told. Our Race alone of all
Shall ride upon the welter of the
world—

This seething ocean of unnumbered men
Poured like a deluge forth from Hellas,
Rome,

Gaul, and Armenia, from the misty North
And Egypt's sandy heart. The Chosen we,
And from our sacred and predestined root
The Son of God must bloom. If otherwise
The Eternal breaks His Covenant with
man—

A blasphemy to whisper. 'Tis for Christ—
For Christ we keep our blood a fountain
pure ;



For Christ we walk unspotted as a maid
That waits her promised spouse.

Who better know
Than ye, how fainting earth Messiah craves?
Who better know the faltering, the grief,
The dwindling hope, the ever-waxing fear?
Pagans are thundering at our Temple gates
And at our hearts; all expectation droops
And noblest spirits sicken with the dearth
Of these sad, twilight days. Deep from their
tombs

The prophets of the promises, attent,
Still listen, sleeping not until the truth
Whispered by God, through God shall come
full round

Unto fulfilment. Yet Judea's ear,
That strains for the first trumpet from on
high,

Gleans nothing but the roar of Roman
wheels

And clang of mail, where the deep valley
dust

Spews forth another legion; still her eyes—

Her patient eyes, uplifted to the hills—
See nought but gathering eagles, that would
 fain
Play vulture with her corse.

O Palestine!

Thy zealous child was Judas till this morn,
And love of thee, and hope, and utmost
 faith

In thine eternal heritage from Heaven,
Have slain him now. Yet can a myth so
 weigh

That men of might are called to perish
 for it?

List then, how, yearning for Messiah's Hour,
I met Him, as I dreamed—the Son of God—
Moving amid His own, who knew Him not.

To me came Jesus, and I marvelled much
How a poor preacher of the hedge and
 ditch

Should dare to challenge reason. "Friend,"
 said I,

For I had heard the seer tell his tale,

“Now hail thee, ‘King of Beggars,’ not of
men!

Go, stir the antres of the wilderness
For starving, wolfish things that cry to
herd

And hunt their betters; promise ample prey
To vermin and the pariahs of earth—
The living dust that rises in a storm
To choke clean throats and nostrils. Foolish
man!

Equality thou preachest in God’s Name,
Who made all things unequal; thou wouldst
set

That futile, deadly lance in every hand—
To wound itself withal. And what of these?
Dost think this fœtid rout of draggle-tails
And dropsies and lopped limbs and palsied
legs

Doth march to take a kingdom?

“True, thou say’st

Thy kingdom is not founded upon earth.
Then shall this cankered trash ascend to
Heaven,

Where kings do service and the prophets
kneel

Before the Throne of God? What pledge
hast thou,

Wild shepherd of the goats, that shall
affirm

Thy fold's security? The robber folk—

Those nomad leaders, who draw men away,

And sharpen secret swords on desert stones

To carve up our tame cities presently—

Their purpose one doth comprehend, but
thine——?

What head shalt thou make? Who shall fear
thine hordes?

What sure salvation may this crippled band

Of all incompetencies win from thee?

Lead them direct, if thou wouldst be their
friend,

Down to the silent sanctuaries of death,

Where none shall suffer at them. It is
there

Their heritage doth lie. In mercy point

The shortest road and bid them follow it,

That earth may sweeter be by their surcease.
Their malady is weakness—a supreme
And potent poison in the world's affairs,
That, like some foul but ever-flowing tide,
Creeps up the rock of power and lifts and
lifts
To drown the lonely strong. This rodent
plague

Judea frets, and now, most sorely struck
By the fierce hectic of that fever fell,
She faints beneath the mastership of Rome.
Ye teach the weak to hate and not to trust ;
Ye cry that strength is sin and might a
vice

In sight of the Almighty ! Erring friend,
If weakness be the highest good on earth,
Then let the highest weakness rule the earth,
And yonder crooked fragment of a man,
Half eaten by the leprosy, that drags
His trunk with handless arms along the
dust,

Be lifted to the throne, or take the field
Against our myriad foes ! ”

But Jesus bore
With all the withering scorn I poured about
His ragged faction. Gently thus he spake :
" Upon the weakest link depends the chain
That draws to Heaven. All mankind in
truth

May win thereto, but yet is it decreed
That these sore-stricken, wounded companies
Of unloved and unprofitable people
Inherit first ; for if they be not heirs
Of their Eternal Father's home, then none
Is heir and He shall all forget. But know
The Everlasting One appraiseth not
Man at man's value. On a golden scale
God measures, and the weight thereof is
love.

Oh ! subtle, subtle is the love of God—
A fire that eats the green and spares the
dry ;
A wind that blows away the heavy grain
From earthly threshing-floors, and leaves the
chaff
For heavenly garnerers. 'Tis a force beyond

All wit of man to mete, or dimly know,
Or watch i' the working ; therefore be assured
That many a mighty one ye hold and
hug

And deem august and call the salt of earth,
Shall prove but dust of Heaven—less, far
less

Than these poor, hunger-bitten, frantic things,
Led by the first faint hope their souls have
known,

That crawl to make my pomp.” Further he
spake—

Ye know the matter of his charge and plea,
Since often, in your darkness, ye have cursed
To mark the message echoed high and low.
But me he tented deep : his rede was new,
Yet pregnant, and it touched me to the
quick

Of my soul's life ; for long had I believed
That good and evil in the ways of man
Were ravelled up and knotted and entwined
Beyond all resolution ; sure was I
That in the alembic of the human heart

Old rights and wrongs were melted into
one ;

That evil leavened good, that good itself,
Since the Mosaic legacy was spent,
Had grown of grim complexion ; and I saw
How values after measurement of man
Were vain and void.

He said that he was God,
And reason fell upon its knees to hear,
For he believed himself ! There was in
him

Living assurance and the power to win
A cold and doubting spirit with a phrase.
He said that he was God, and I believed,
Wrested thereto by shock of wakened love
And pride in friendship ; for until he came
Before the portals of this lonely heart
And sought to enter, all my life austere
Had driven men away, where beacons burned
That promised warmer welcome. Thus it
fell

That I accepted from my pent-up heart
Fully and perfectly with hungry joy ;

For when such secret souls as mine once
love,

The torrent bursts all bounds and pours
itself

In a raging flood. And as I haunted him,
To hear the evangel, luminous and pure,
Of his most glorious hope, I felt in truth
The Ancient of the Ages had sent forth
His very Son to earth, and willed that He
Should walk unseen till now. For this man
lived

With such a life as never had I seen
In all the paths of men; a bloom of being
Shone like the Springtime from his radiant
soul.

He gave his life as others fling away
Their riches—gave and gave and gave again.
Like the sweet music of the psaltery,
That wearies never while the fingers pluck,
Even so he, while men had ears to hear,
Sang a new music to humanity.
He held a light; he spake a wondrous
word,

And Mercy was its name : gentle indeed,
Yet terrible. A boon and benison
To all forgotten, fruitless, weary souls
And the sad staple of our human kind ;
A death eternal to the order old,
That sank within the still and marble past
Entombed by him.

‘The poor in spirit blessed !’

Lo, what a challenge, what an anthem
new,

Dropped like a singing star from highest
Heaven,

Was there of revolution ! So he came,
From David’s seed to make the peace with
God :

Rainbow of Promise on the thunder-cloud
Of our primordial fall and dreadful fate—
The Christ indeed !

“Oh, let one joyful shout
From all the wide-winged seraphim in
Heaven,

Proclaim Thee now the Master of this
world !”

Thus cried my awakened soul—I gave up all
And followed him, and left him nevermore.
My hard-won learning into night I cast
Before this dawn of everlasting truth,
Emptied my brain and scoured away my lore,
As I had cleansed a vessel that was foul ;
I scorned my body, elbowed the unclean,
Suffered the heat and hunger, shared my
 goods,
And held our pitiful purse ; all I forgot
And put behind me, since it was his will,
Thus sacrificing reason to the faith
That he was come to feed the starving earth.

ABOVE all else that drew me to him first
There rang a mighty manifest of truth :
That Heaven's whole kingdom lay within the
 heart !
As corn doth wait the coming of the rain
To spread a vernal veil upon the earth,
Even so rich and heavenly a harvest-field
Each man may make of his poor, barren
 self,

Given the grain from God! For that alone—
That echo of a golden verity
Reverberating to despondent souls—
I would have followed Jesus.

Close I kept,

But not submerged within the gathering host
That moved about his way. Far otherwise—
'Twas my swift ear that ever truliest heard;
'Twas I that of the twelve—his chosen
ones—

Grew drunk upon the cup he offered us.
To no high issues were the rest ordained;
The draught he daily poured fired not at all
Their simple minds: as dew-drop from the
reed,

His secret 'scaped them. Like a flock of
sheep

They grazed along behind the shepherd's
heels,

Content to follow where he chose to go,
To ask for nothing but their daily meed,
And bleat a little when the way was
steep.

But, through the chambers of my swifter
brain,

The force ineffable and secret fire
Of all he taught us leapt and burned apace.

In frenzy of anticipation fierce

I saw the promised conquest of this
world,

That first should come ; I ate my spirit out,
While still he tarried, caring not that time
Sped on, and that Judea's lowly couch
Was wet with tears.

Then, what he would not tell,
I strove to win by ambushes of words
And questions deeply masked. Through starry
nights,

When far afield amid the desert wilds,
Or by the margin of the inland sea,
Way-worn and weary, he would lay him
down

To sleep on any pillow with the twelve,
I pressed him close, revealed my loftier
thoughts

And wider sympathies. I showed to him

How far unlike the fishermen was I ;
How swift of mind and subtle ; how I saw,
Out of the human love I bore to him,
The goal whereto he travelled, and the
way !

I spoke of mighty dead who knew not
God,

Yet whom God knew, and breathed upon and
showed

The fore-glow whose true dawn would blaze
anon

To light His Chosen. Yea, I told the tale
Of Athens and the wondrous sons she bare
To the true God, while yet unnumbered false
Tore at the people's hearts with human
hands.

For human were they—men and women all—
Wrought by the seers of that olden time
To be a boon for them who cried for
gods.

Living and breathing visions from the void,
They came in sunny splendour to the folk,
And all the people lived beside their gods

As learned magi and the sages live
Beside their symbols. But mock deities
Possess no power to make their servants
men,

Such as are we ; though cunning artists came,
Juggled with marble, ivory, and gold,
And raised a very galaxy of gods
On high for devilish idolatry
Within a thousand temples. Now the doom
Of the one God we worship falls, and
night

Eternal soon shall gulf that lingering brood
Of gods inferior to Fate—poor ghosts—
Less than their Themis—Jove's assessor dire.
Anon, I named in his unlisting ear
That master-spirit—he who steadfast shone
Like a sure pharos on the broken waves
And ebb and flow of thought ; to show the
rocks

That filled those stormy channels, ere our
God

The charted way for evermore revealed.
But nought he cared for Socrates, until

I named the hemlock cup, and then, indeed,
All vague and drowsy at the brink of
sleep,

Declared that earth must ever stone and
slay

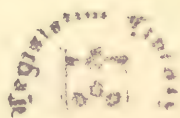
Her prophets. So he fell on slumber deep,
As one, who having poured his life all day
For others' need, must seek the founts of
rest

And deeply draw against to-morrow's toll.
But I slept not : my mind, on pinions swift
Won from his word, now traversed life and
time ;

Dwelt with the rising and the setting stars ;
Leapt the black hills with day to ravish
night ;

Brooded upon our destiny, and strove
How to unwind the purpose of the present
With all its sordid ugliness and want.
Whence this sad waste, these temporal
miseries

Of meagre food, cold welcome, chill response
Unto the tidings? Wherefore did he choose



So arid, profitless, and thorny a path
To David's empty throne? And for how
long

Would he remain content to wear the dress
Of muddy man, while from his eyes there
glowed

The fire divine? Now in a gentle beam
Of most benignant light 'twas wont to
shine ;

Now, like the awful, azure tongue of levin
From heart of storm, it flashed the ire of
God ;

And whether 'twas a smile he downward
cast,

Gentle and lambent on the little ones
Who struggled to be throned upon his knee,
Or 'gainst yourselves a knotted brow he
bent

To shrivel up your broad phylacteries—
Whether in joy or sorrow, peace or pain,
Those eyes declared him, born out of the
blue

Of sea and sky and mountain-purple dim

All men have seen, none trodden. There I
drank,
And something of the deeper mystery won
That he denied his lips.

Nay, move ye not!

Harken, ye frozen ones, some season yet
To this confusion of a frustrate soul.
He said that he was God, and I believed,
And cast about to help the world believe.

HAVE ye not seen at Sidon, when a ship,
New launched upon the haven's peace, doth
put
To sea, how first the aid of little boats
The virgin vessel craves? Such lesser craft
Bring forth the argosy when she doth bid
Farewell to earth. It is their humble part
To draw her stately from the circling arms
Of the land-mother, where her shape was
built—

In the far forest first, and then by man
Beside her future home and destiny.
So slowly forth she comes unto the sea,

To feel the wind upon her sails' deep bosom
And the wide wave, that laughs and shows
its teeth

Smote by her virgin stem. And thus her
course

She takes and weds the fickle main, nor
knows

How long his love will last. In maiden
trust

She bows to the great deep and yields herself
Into his keeping, with companionship
Of willing winds and waves and leaping
foam.

Music doth mark her going, where the ropes
Sing to the harper with the unseen hand ;
A sudden splendour of pure golden light
Burns on her opening wings, and from the
sun

To the least human eye upon the shore,
All mark her hopeful course and joyful
might,

Taking good heart and happiness to see
The pride of Sidon sweep upon her way.

The little ships creep back. They are forgot;
Yet to good purpose have they played their part,
And justified themselves. Consider then
That even such a little ship was I—
Judas, that speak to ye.

Now grew a hope,
A hope that swelled into a fierce resolve,
To draw my master from this coward peace
And launch him swift on his immortal
voyage.

Oh! see ye not, even ye who hated him,
His majesty of purpose? Granted all
Was but a gorgeous dream, by dreams men
guess

At the heart of the dreamer; for your
slumbering mind,

Albeit free from earth's material grip
And desolating fetters of the real,
Still bears the sleepers' stamp. No evil man
Hath noble visions, and no lofty soul,
Though it be foundered in the fens of sleep,
Is moved to dream of baseness. Bear in
mind

He is a Galilean—men who dream
By nature, and their visions oft translate
Into the stuff of warlike, waking life.
His heart to yours is as the living bud
To the dead leaf beside it on the bough.
Remember, priests, that he believed himself—
Yea, he believed himself; and was it strange
That, seeing men and what men seek and
shun,

And measuring the gulf that yawned betwixt
His own sad soul and theirs, this Nazarene
Should dream a fiery breath of very God
Had burned into his bosom? Was it strange?
Then read the world's innumerable hearts—
Yea, read your own, and match me if you
can

A heart like his—this lonely man of men!
I ever knew him best; 'twas I that saw
The truth eternal gleam like gem in jewel
When he but talked to children: I perceived
The deepening mystery and waxing wonder
As swift, from strength to strength, he upward
soared,

Upon the wings of his great spirit borne,
While weak and weaker grew his earthly
frame.

I knew the never-sleeping voice he heard
That called to battle, and I shook to know
More than the master's self could guess or
see ;

For here all human hope of Heaven, housed
Within a habitation perilous,
And man's salvation, now within man's sight,
Threatened through man's own frailty to fail !
Measure ye that? Full sure the tortuous
ways

Of dialectic deep that ye pursue,
Should train your minds to this same
subtlety

That made me fear. I thought he was a
lamp—

A lamp incarnate, dazzled by the glare
Of his own awful radiance and the blaze
Of the supernal Godhead, Who had willed
Descend upon this humble one ; I feared
A load, too weighty for the Anakim,

Began to kill my Jesus. His poor flesh
Sank underneath the strain; he fainted oft
And suffered through long secrecies; he
wept;

He groaned in spirit with his Father hid;
Battled through many a midnight hour with
Fear,

And gazed in terror at the front of Fate.

He moved as one who shudders for his
thought,

And cannot banish from his fearful eyes
The haunting shadow that will peep and
peer.

Stumbling in our mortality, too weak
To tear it from him; shrinking, flinching
yet

From all the majesty and magnitude
Of the high task, that echoed to his soul
From the far corridors of earliest time,
When Adam fell, he went his doubtful way.
Still, still the master spake with Heaven's
voice,

But was content to speak; to act delayed.

And this I marked and girt my huge resolve
To make him act and sweep him surely on
To his epiphany.

WITH zeal at heat,
Undaunted courage, and the purest faith
That ever burned—an incense unto God ;
Fired for my failing country ; torn with lust
To do my Father's will, I strove to find
Whether I might in all humility
Essay the help that to his fellow-man
Man giveth. Seeing, then, that Jesus knew
Our common suffering and sadly bent
Beneath the stern and universal yoke,
I spake to him and bade him doff his
flesh,
As one doth doff a garment before toil.
“ Jesus of Nazareth, Thou Prince of Light,
Leave prayers and fasting unto sons of men,
Who know but how to pray and how to
fast :
Thou art the Son of God ! Thy Father now
Bends His omnipotent and questioning eyes

From the lone height of Heaven to seek His
Son.

He searcheth not beside the dusty knoll,
Nor scorched highway, nor shadow of the
stone,

Nor temple of red, jackal-haunted rocks
Upon the desert sand. Not on the wave
When fishers draw their nets through Galilee,
Nor mid the shards and skeletons that
show

Where cities stood to crown the vanished
past,

His First Begotten shall the Godhead find ;
Not synagogues reward the Almighty's search,
Nor yet the Temple, where keen, vulpine
eyes

Of them that hate Thee flash, and where the
ears

Are pricked that would confound Thee in
Thy speech.

A sword, my Master, Thou hast come to
draw ;

Then bare it, and along that awful blade

Bring down the thunderbolt upon Thy foes
And liberate the people of our God.
Loose them and lift them up. Let them
arise

Out of the dust rejoicing and be whole—
A nation worth Thy kingship—yea, a race
Whose humblest ones are fit to fill the
thrones

Of lesser kingdoms. O Thou Son of
Heaven,

To rule and reign Thou com'st! Thy Godly
part

Is not to creep with mean humility
Among the weary-footed. Thou dost bring
Salvation to the stricken sons of Time,
For all are lost without Thee. Hearken then!
Messiah is Messiah—He redeems
The suffering of all the suffering earth;
But, Jesus, Thou dost suffer with the rest!
A suffering Messiah! 'Tis a wrong,
And bitter slight to Heaven. Angels weep
At Thine unseemly torments, for they know
The Saviour comes to save and not to suffer.

Out of the night the enemy doth roar
And hem the darkness in with flaming orbs,
While Palestine, poor scape-goat of the world,
Bleats for the trusted shepherd that she loved,
And marvels that he hath deserted her.

From out their shattered and forgotten graves
The saints and prophets lift a knell to
Thee ;

And on the wide-wayed paths and plains of
Heaven

Thine hosts await one archangelic word,
To loose the hurricane of a million wings,
If Thou but lift Thine eyes—those haunted
eyes

That seek the sky no more, but home in
dust ;

While on this hunger-starved and panting earth,
The spirit of Judea, smouldering still
In many a fruitful, patient one, shall leap
Like fire to fire and lift an answering
flame,

And light the everlasting legions here
To David's City.

“Jesus, Son of God,
All things in Heaven and earth and under
earth—
The beings that we men have never seen,
Who toil beyond our friendship in the
womb
Of this great world; and they, the winged
ones,
Who haunt the air, yet make their presence
known
On hurtling wings that whistle in the
night;
Monsters and demi-gorgons and the giants;
And those 'twixt man and angel God hath
made
For His own purposes to move and live
Secluded from our sense—all, all cry out
In muffled thunder through the universe,
And lift their supplication at this hour
To draw Thee to Thy throne!”
Even thus I spake;
Even thus I prayed with supplicating hands
And voice of inspiration. He heard all,



But answered with the lash of cold rebuke,
And bade me hide myself, nor meet his
gaze

Until my knees were weary of the earth.
Doth fealty, then, demand unthinking suit
Such as our dogs have power to render us?
I thought not so, and smarted when he
chode,

Setting his wrath to human frailty,
That kindled into anger at the truth
Upon my tongue. Yet me he did not daunt:
I yielded not, nor mourned my earnest words,
Since they were winged with love of God and
Man,

But felt the more affirmed to urge him on
And onward. Yea, I studied deeper yet
How best to point the road that he must
go,

Since, man to man, I stronger felt than he
And mightier to hold the Light aloft,
Had I been chosen for the cresset-head.
Then, after prayer and fast and lonely hours,
As deep and secret as the master's own,

There flashed upon my hardy soul from
God—
From God I fondly dreamed—the dreadful
deed
That doth confound me now.

EVEN thus I wrought :
When round the Passover had come again
And to Jerusalem he set his face,
I learned your conclave sat in secrecy
And pondered still how best to overthrow
The man the people loved. Then hastened I
From Bethany and, with a stroke of guile
Deeper than yours, declared how I might
give
Jesus into your hands at dead of night,
When all the city slept. I feigned to sell
The man I thought was God ; and glad were
ye,
Haggling like hucksters in the mart of flesh,
To buy a prophet's blood for yonder trash
That blights the mottled marble of the floor.
Then there awoke the spirit we call Chance,

To fool and fortify me at a breath ;
For clear unto my busy brain it seemed
That Jesus knew full well the thing I did,
And when this night in upper room we sat
At meat together, twice he smiled on me,
And I discerned approval in his eyes.
"Do quickly what thou doest." Thus he
spake ;
And I went forth into the deep blue night,
Ere yet the wonder of the lesser stars
Was dimmed before the moon. In hungry
joy
I ran to help the Son of God ; I came
And planned with ye to lead your servants
forth
Through the still olive gardens of that glade
Where best he loved to pray.
It was ordained
Where I should meet your people, where the
rout
And soldiers and centurion should bide
To wait me. Then with soul translated high,
Ecstatic, fleet of foot, along I went

Through moonlit paths of the night-hidden
Mount,

That I might see if all were well with him.
Because he knew, indeed, that this still hour
Was great with his great destiny ; he knew
The orb and sceptre of all earth were set
Unto his blessed hand. Thus ran my thought,
And, hid behind an ancient bole, I saw,
In battle with the ever-living God,
My master all alone.

How small he looked—
How small and shrunk and desolate ! The
sight
My own high spirit quenched and chilled my
heart.

THOU knowest, O priests, how all our
rolling hills
Are clothed in misty green and flashing fires
That twinkle when the winds but touch the
woods.
Where in her legions doth the olive stand.
There is a glittering of silver light

Within them, and wine-purple shadows rove
Upon their billowing breasts. They are the
garb

And deathless vesture of our aged hills;
They robe each undulation, knap, and knoll;
And oft their name upon the sacred page
Of God's own message lies. In Spring they
scent

The air with myriad blossoms, and the joy
Of all their new-born leaves doth roll along—
A cloud of radiant silver o'er the Mount.
And later, ere the precious seed-time comes,
And harvest-fields grow white, and skin of
grape

Thins underneath the lustre of the bloom,
Their berries turn to ripeness, till each tree
Doth show her diadem of starry leaves
All gemmed with purple. And our God hath
said

That we shall strike them not a second time
And clamber not again amid the boughs,
To shower their treasure on the sheet out-
spread,

But leave good measure of His gracious gift
For fatherless and widows, and for them
Who seek as strangers for our comforting.
A symbol thus of charity she stands ;
And so did Jesus seek her, for he read
Pure love into her loveliness ; he found
That fragrant peace and silence made their
homes

Amid her secret places. Them he sought ;
And now I watched, the while he sought in
vain.

'Tis an abode of eld, where Time's own self
May be surprised asleep, and primal things
Brood near, unseen but felt ; the mystery
Of peace stupendous, of a peace beyond
The gentlest whisper of a tongue to tell
Doth shroud this place ; and here, upon the
earth,

He knelt in torment. Round about his feet
The blood-red wind-flowers blew, their colour
sucked

Away by the white moon, and through the
bough

Low stars flashed largely from a fret of
leaves

Where dim, innumerable olives dreamed
Like smoke of myrrh and storax.

Hast thou heard
Old olive trees that murmur in the night?
Dost know the bated hush they keep? Hast
seen

The moon cast down at foot of every tree
A shadow, like an ebon garment dropped
From each time-foundered trunk? All stunted,
gnarled,

They huddled round about him where he
knelt,

And made a cincture of their aged limbs
Above his secret agonies, as though

The venerable, grey ambassadors
Were pilgrims from another world than ours,
Where trees are conscious creatures. Ears
had they

And eyes: they heard and saw. In dismal
trance

Above his dolour, all the ambient air

Was sunk and held its sorrowful breath
awhile,

Afraid to whisper. Interlacing boughs
By chance upon his lonely place of prayer
The shadow of a Roman cross threw down
Along the dew-white grasses ; and he saw
And swiftly marked the filthy symbol flung
Into that anguished hour. The moon shone
full

Upon his harrowed forehead, and I stared
To see his years had doubled in an
hour.

His burning, tearless eyes were lifted up
To mirror all the woe of all the world,
And blazing agony burned on his brow
Like a red flame ; he writhed and flung him
down

With face against the earth ; and his dire
load

Of torn and tortured clay upon this rack
Seemed like to perish ere he cast it off.
He fought, the soul embattled 'gainst the
flesh ;

And still most steadfastly I watched with
faith,

Believing in my heart that he was God.

Yet did I weep, for well I loved the man

And would have succoured him in that dark
hour,

But that I knew the battle now he waged

Might not be shared. I mourned his awful
grief;

And then to joy arose, and scarce could
hide

For longing to give praise. I watched and
saw

The Godhead conquer! After bitter stress

He lifted up his head, destroyed the peace,

And thrilled the listening forest with a
prayer.

Aloud he wailed, and through the nightly
aisles

Of all that sylvan gloom his piteous voice

Like a lost spirit thrid. And thus he
cried:

"Father! if it be possible, this cup

Remove from me." Whereon the silence
crept

Close, like a presence; for not only he
But all earth listened, and that planet old
We call the moon, while in the upper air
Of widest welkin, not a single star
But ceased its throb to hear the Father's
voice

Ring through high Heaven.

Now his haunted eyes
My master closed and waited patiently
If peradventure should an angel fly
With answer to his prayer. But all was still,
And since none came, a deep and doleful
breath

Shook him where still he knelt—a racking
sigh

That menaced his worn life and weary heart.
Again he spake, and in a voice resigned
Yielded his manhood and assumed the God.

"Not as I will, my Father, but as Thou
Shalt will, so be it!" Then I knelt me
down

Even as Jesus rose, all imminent,
And shone and towered above himself, as
though

Some cloud celestial he had been, that crowns
The heights of earth and lifts, itself a world,
To take the glory of the noonday sun
Upon its many mounting crests and domes,
And golden gleaming pinnacles. So he
Now stood transfigured, mighty, motionless,
His eyes uplifted upon Heaven's gate
To see the portals swing! And to my sense,
Enthralled by this full moment, now it
seemed

The entranced night awakened at his word
And burst its long suspension—budded,
bloomed

In scent and song and joyful murmurings
Through every dusky dene and solemn depth
Of all those woodland ways. For nigh at
hand,

Within a myrtle thicket by the path
That hither led, where the sweet mastic grows
And fragrant, hoary herbs defy the sun,

The liquid music of a little bird
Now sudden tinkled forth melodiously.
A hidden bul-bul had begun to sing
In dreams upon his perch, then waked himself
And poured from out that dewy dingle dark
A hymn of praise; so that the bird and I
Were first of the world's creatures to proclaim
The Son of God. Then round about there
sprang

Great candid lilies from adoring earth,
That lifted all their silver censers sweet
About his dusty knees. Aloft there hung,
In ordered legions round the pascal moon,
A gathering fret and panoply of clouds,
That from their woven woof and web of pearl
About the orb, in one translucent cirque,
Cast a dim rainbow. Then they broke and
massed

Until the sky, to my transported sense,
Began to be alive with rushing wings
And swift, star-pointed lances. Knowing then
The time was come, I tore me from my
place,

To speed where the impatient torches flashed
And men cried out for Judas.

LIKE a snake,
With rufous scales and smoking breath, we crept
Winding along the Mount. The patient trees
Took on our sanguine livery one by one ;
The owlet fled into the virgin dark
Before our riot. Scattered we the dew
From off the grasses, bruised the sleeping
flowers,
And frightened things unseen in holt and den ;
We threaded still Gethsemane with fire
And stench and sooty smoke, that rolled aloft
Above the mail-clad men, till all the earth
Was fouled and violated ere we came
To his inviolate place. But I before
The mob so swiftly flew, they bade me stay,
Nor overrun their rabble. On we fared
Until we came where Jesus waited us,
Surrounded by those others who had slept
The while he suffered. Him I straightway
kissed

And dreamed I signalled God! Ye know the
rest.

No Father smiled on that deserted son;
No fiery-footed cherubim swept down
To smite his foes; no peal celestial shook
The grave of night to set the dayspring free;
No heavenly beam, from that high place
above

The sun, shone out to dazzle earth. Instead
A lonely, broken, and deserted man
They haled among them to the judgment-
seat.

PRIESTS, I have sinned a thousand ways in
this.

Most precious, innocent blood is ceded up—
Most precious and most innocent and pure.
A spirit of unbounded worth is he
And high benignant purpose: not our God,
But ranged along with God, and yearning deep
To soothe the earth's wide, mordant miseries

So far as one man may. And if he go
To the Roman beam, then it is I alone
That murder him and slay my only friend.
Oh, suffer no such everlasting curse
To fasten on my soul! Be patient, Scribes,
For if this man is mad, then by how much
More mad am I, who dared to think myself
Subtler than God? Here standeth one who
toiled

To guide the Everlasting and direct
His proper path! What man run lunatic
Dreamed folly fearfuller?

Know ye remorse?

Ye cannot, for this Jesus ye would slay
Was first to find it. His concept of sin,
So dreadful, new, and pregnant, gave it birth;
Out of his lofty soul the demon came—
A foul thing from a fair; a pestilence;
An evil exhalation given forth
By corpse of perished deed; a death in life;
A doom, a mortal poison that doth clog
The very springs of action. From the past—
The all-accomplished past—it crawleth back

To rend the living present from our hands ;
It leapeth down upon the helmsman, Hope,
Who steers each labouring barque of human
 life,

And fastens on him, tiger-wise and fanged,
Until the tiller's free, the vessel wrecked.
It gnaws the lust of living from the heart,
Endeavour slays, emasculates the will ;
It broods and breeds and festers, till that
 man,

Noble of heart enough to feel its power,
Carries a hideous load of gangrened soul
While yet his flesh is firm ; and thus he
 moves

Amid the pinnacles of agony
That only spirits know, and shrieks aloud
His sleepless sin. Have I not often seen
Its ravages within those trusting hearts
That went along with him ? Aye, that I have,
And marvelled how he held the dreadful
 power

With gentlest words to kill a bounding hope,
Or bring a hale and happy human soul,



All joy, with life on tiptoe, down to this
Infernal depth and fling it suddenly
Writhing and maimed upon the shards of sin,
Like a cut worm. And here stand I
destroyed

By this unspeakable and deadly bane ;
For though my purpose aimed as high as
Heaven,

Its overthrow now flings me to the deep,
With those accursèd who betray their trust
And earn remorse : Hell's masterpiece. My
heart

Doth hold Gehenna—length and breadth and
verge ;

Its least and mightiest torments hide within
This single bosom, where but yesternight
Homed all the bliss of Heaven ; and I
stand

Suppliant for death—the death ye measure
him.

Tormented am I to the raging core
Of my dark soul—all dazed and terrified,
Like to an over-driven beast, that glares

And foams with thirst and pleads wild-eyed
for peace.

I loved him, loved him with most passionate
love ;

And that same love, now fallen on such bale,
By the Almighty's dread decree, doth bring
My toll of days in helpless, hopeless gloom
To death inexorable.

Dead indeed

Unto this world am I—wakened from dreams
Of Zion's far-flung glory to a morn
Most desolately dark. My country's good,
Her welfare and her triumph ultimate
Still lie within Jehovah's council hid.

'Tis not for me : 'tis never now for me
To run beside the chariot-wheel of God—
And that's a grief to slay a heart like
mine,

Fed on the manna of the promises
He breathed ; but worse is here of agony,
Most personal, particular, and close.

I loved the man, I say, and still love on,
Albeit the God was but a god-like dream.

And what remains? The man that dreamed
so well

Lies in your power, a jest for Roman slaves,
Who spit upon him by the guard-room fire,
Fling purple on his shoulders, thrust a reed
Within his patient hand and bid him tell
Their cursèd names that smote him: His
great soul

Ye cannot mar, but mine ye must pollute
Beyond all strength but the Eternal's own
To cleanse, if ye shall crucify that man.
O Caiaphas, doth yet thy breast-plate hide
A heart beneath its twelve-fold splendour
bright?

Then strive to feel therein what now I
feel,

And pity me in truth by pitying him,
Who at the Everlasting's whisper dark,
And secret will, by us not understood,
Was driven to declare himself Messiah.
Is that which we call madness also sin?

Then half the world we pity, we should
damn.

The mad are God's own mouthpiece ; wouldst
thou dare

Thus to destroy the chosen of the Lord ?

What sin dost find in him ? His gentle wits

Run over into this, and who is hurt ?

Granted his word was vain ; yet all his acts

Who live, that love their neighbour as
themselves,

Can less than praise and honour ? He but
taught

That God is love ; then let that love of
loves

Cast out the fear for evermore ye preach ;

Oh ! let him mercy have, who mercy brought—

A gift from Heaven to the merciless.

Are ye akin to that unthinking herd

Who will cry "Crucify !" when day is come,

Because their promised God is but a man ?

Do ye, too, seek to feed your priestly hate

On innocence ? Nay, take the guilty one

Who well hath earned the worst that ye can
do.

'Tis I that should be crucified ; 'tis I

That planned and plotted to confound your
craft

And cast you down to night; 'tis I that
strove,

With all my passionate, unsleeping strength,

Upon your ruined synagogues to found

A Temple where no priests shall minister

Or cast their shadows between God and man!

Take me and let him go. What sin is his?

What table hath he spread for hungry men

Ye could not sup at? Search the Thora
through,

Ye shall not find a law to slay this man;

And that done, seek again within yourselves,

Where sit the heavenly arbiters, and hear

What saith the still small voice that, like a
bell,

Strikes in the holy places of man's heart.

'Twill bid you pardon him and let him go

In peace away.

Oh! ye that hold the power,

Wield it but gently o'er this innocent head,

Whose only thought was rescue of mankind.

The man is young ; his universal love
Hath burnt him up. Enthusiasm deep,
With a fierce aura of divine desire,
Doth quite consume him, even while he
 strives

By its celestial light to find his way,
And still existeth, sick almost to death.
Then let him pass in peace, where he hath
 fought

And loved and striven, flinging forth his days
Like rainbows through the gloom of Palestine,
Till all are spent. Leave ye the man to God,
And suffer me to die for him.

 Your heads

Ye shake against me. Ye resign and doom
This sad, unspotted fool of highest Heaven
To Golgotha? Then heed a dying tongue
That tolls on life's last threshold and shall
 sound

Never again for shadow-casting men.
May every piece of that foul silver there
Sparkling, as Satan's eyes beneath the Tree
Of Knowledge in the garden—may each one,

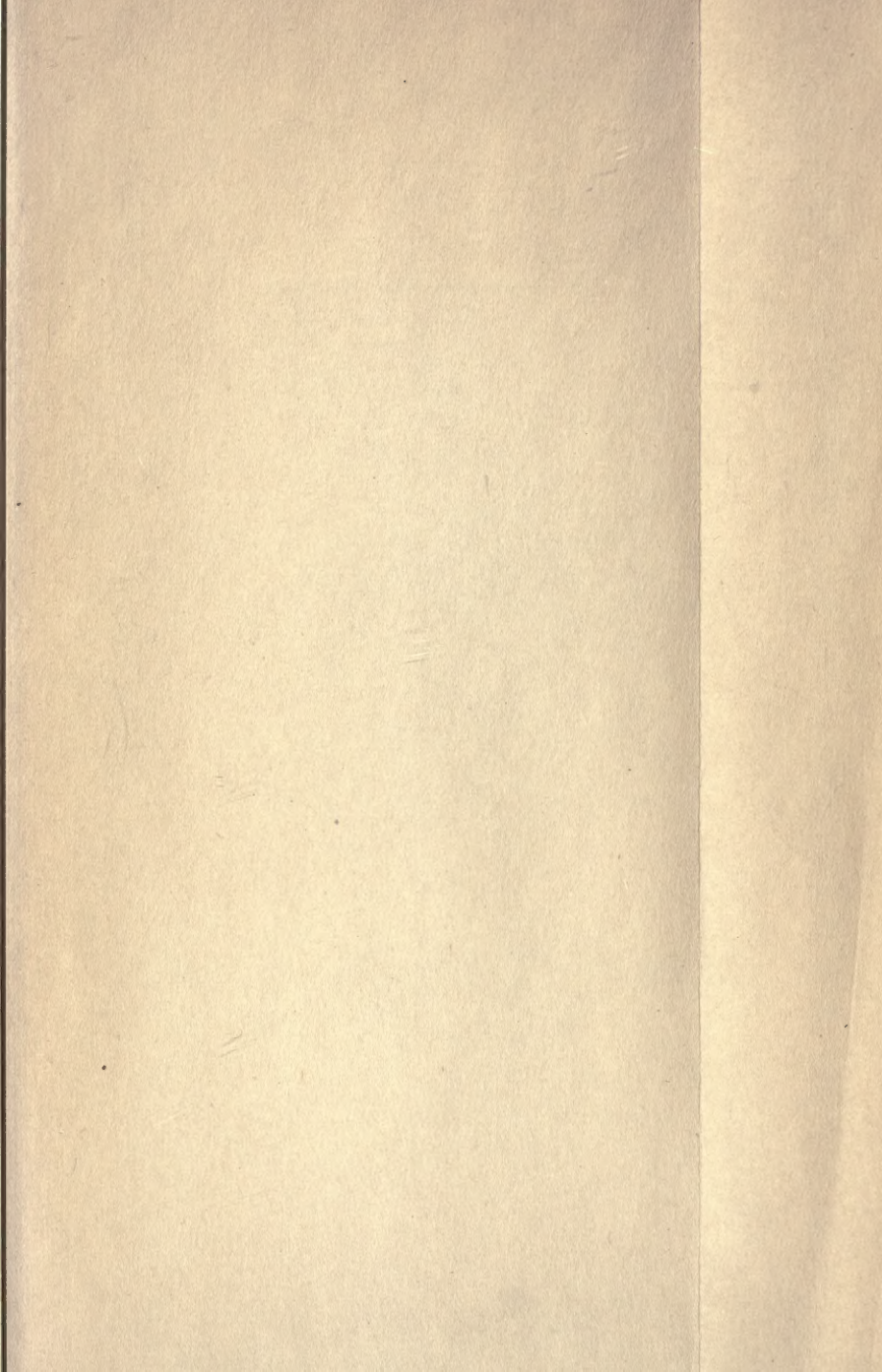
All wet with Jesus' blood, go breed in hell
As money never bred on earth. May each
Beget a million dagger-pointed flames
To scorch and blister in your deathless flesh ;
May all the art of fiends devise such grief
As ruined souls have never known, till ye
Sink to the lowest vault and torture-house
Gehenna holds. Your cursèd hearts are stone,
But in the fury of the nether fires
They'll crack at last, and tear your bosoms
out,

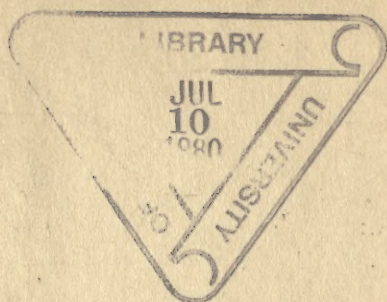
And leave you empty for the undying worm
To fret and gnaw through all eternity.
'Tis I that must be damned upon this earth
While my betrayal lives in memory
Misunderstood of ages ; yet an hour
Doth lie in time when the Eternal Hand
Shall seal forgiveness. Now I go my way,
To quit me of this dust men Judas call,
And take my lowly, penitential place
Before the portal of that secret State,
Where ghosts of men abide the will of God.
Thither I hasten, that when Jesus comes,

The foremost of all spirits waiting him,
With forehead on the earth, the Iscariot kneels.
So shall he, reading in the bloody book
Of my sore, wounded soul, lift up his voice
And pardon——

(Judas goes out. Caiaphas and the rest rise. There is a great expiration of breath and rustle of garments. Clear cold light has filled the sky, and the stars are no more seen. Jerusalem lies black against the whiteness of the dawn.)

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